

CERP." It has now been documented that they want to go even larger and even bigger with these large multi-million dollar projects. I cannot stand by as we spend billions on roads, electrical grids, and bridges in Afghanistan, knowing the incredible need we have in this country for exactly that kind of investment.

These projects are not being built in a secure environment. We are paying off people to try to keep the contractors safe. And it has been documented that some of that money has gone right into the hands of our enemy. That must be stopped.

These projects, in many if not most instances, cannot be sustained. I can give a number of examples. But all you would have to do is travel around Iraq and see the empty, crumbling health care centers built with American taxpayer dollars, the water park that is a twisted pile of rubble that is no longer operational, all of the investments that were made in oil production and electricity generation that were blown to bits.

I can give specific examples in Afghanistan. How about hundreds of million of dollars spent on a powerplant—the latest technology: dual fuel—and nobody there knows how to operate it. And they cannot afford to operate it, so it stands by as an empty, hulking potential generator for backup power, while they buy cheaper electricity from a neighboring country.

For the first time, the Department of Defense has requested and received \$400 million in authorization in this new Afghanistan Reconstruction Fund. We should limit our military to the small projects that CERP was originally intended for, not produce contracts to major, multinational corporations.

All of these reconstruction funds should be pulled, and my amendment would do just that. We would pull all of this money out with the exception of projects under \$50,000. That would be as much as \$700 million that we could immediately put directly into the highway trust fund in this country. That is what my amendment does. It will transfer that investment from a non-secure environment, in areas these projects cannot be sustained, to the very needy cause of infrastructure investment in the United States of America.

Let's do this. Let's stop these large projects that cannot be secured and be sustained. Keep in mind, as much as \$700 million would be pulled, and that is a small fraction of what we are spending in Afghanistan. The authorization for next year is more than \$100 billion. So anyone who tries to say this will cripple our mission in Afghanistan does not understand the numbers. Of the moneys we are spending in Afghanistan, the vast majority is about personnel: to train the Afghan military, to train the Afghanistan police department, to fight the terrorists who are there, the Taliban, al-Qaida in the areas near Pakistan. All of that re-

mains. A very small percentage of this would be pulled. But it should be pulled, and it should be pulled today. We should take this investment and put it in roads and bridges right here in our country.

I hope this amendment will have success when we look at the appropriations process. I think it is time we stop this funding, and stop it now.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Mexico.

DR. DONALD BERWICK

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I want to take a few minutes to commend Dr. Donald Berwick for his service as Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and also to express my deep disappointment that his nomination was blocked by a minority of Senators.

CMS, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, has benefitted greatly from Dr. Berwick's innovation and leadership, and the refusal of some Members to support confirming him for this position is difficult to understand.

Dr. Berwick is widely recognized as a highly qualified leader in the realm of health care quality. But, unfortunately, many of my colleagues across the aisle adamantly opposed Dr. Berwick's tenure, beginning when he was first nominated by President Obama for this position in April of last year. Many of these objections are based on inaccurate accusations and sound bites that have been completely taken out of context.

Dr. Berwick has the qualifications, expertise, and demonstrated leadership ability that CMS needs at this critical time. He is a pediatrician by training, Harvard professor, health care analyst, elected member of the Institute of Medicine, a leading advocate on health care quality and patient safety, and a cofounder of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, which is a respected think tank that trains hospitals on how to increase patient safety and improve operations.

Don Berwick has also written extensively, with there being more than 120 scholarly articles he has authored or coauthored, along with several books, on the quality and efficiency of health care.

Dr. Berwick is a true visionary. He has been an advocate for transparency and accountability within our health care system, and his distinguished career has made him the ideal candidate to lead the CMS at this critical time.

It was due to Dr. Berwick's deep knowledge of health care, his vast experience, and his passion for this issue that his nomination originally won praise from across the political and professional spectrum. This includes Tom Scully and Mark McClellan, both former Administrators of CMS under President George W. Bush. They strongly endorsed his nomination. His nomination also had the support of Dr.

Nancy Nielsen, who is the past president of the American Medical Association; John Rother, who is the former executive vice president of the AARP; and former Republican Senator from Minnesota, our former colleague, Dave Durenberger. In fact, Newt Gingrich even saluted Dr. Berwick for seeking a "dramatically safer, less expensive, and more effective system of health care."

During his tenure as CMS Administrator—the few months he has been in that position—Dr. Berwick has been able to implement impressive reforms, including launching the new CMS Innovation Center, which will test new health care delivery models that emphasize primary care and innovative ways to finance health care.

He has also instituted a financial incentives program for physicians who use electronic health records. And generally, he has set the tone for health reform to take root and to provide Americans with affordable, high-quality health care in a cost-efficient manner.

To be perfectly clear, I am not in any way suggesting that I do not continue to have enthusiasm for the President's recent nominee to replace Dr. Berwick. From all I know of this nominee, she will do an excellent job. But I am frustrated that an eminently qualified public servant is being denied the opportunity to continue serving the American people in this important position. There is no valid justification for denying him that opportunity.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority's time has expired.

Mr. BINGAMAN. I ask unanimous consent for an additional minute.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BINGAMAN. John McDonough of the Boston Globe, in his commentary on the response to Don Berwick's nomination, wrote:

One of [health care's] most distinguished leaders and voices got mugged by partisan Republicans who know better and who got away with it.

I am truly disappointed that certain Senators have pledged to block his nomination and that he has chosen to resign his position effective tomorrow.

Our task now is to assess the new nominee the President has sent us. I hope Members can come together to do what is right in this circumstance; that is, to quickly confirm an Administrator for this very important position.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, it is my understanding that I have 20 minutes of time allotted under morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, each Senator has 10 minutes to speak.

Mr. COATS. All right. Mr. President, I do not think I will use all of those 20 minutes. I might ask for 10 additional

minutes. I will use the 10 minutes, but I may need to ask for some additional time if it works out and others are not waiting.

FISCAL STABILITY

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I come to the floor deeply disappointed—like many—over our failure to seize a unique opportunity to put America on a more fiscally sane path for the future.

My No. 1 priority for this year—I have talked about it so many times, not only publicly but with colleagues in discussions for nearly a year—that No. 1 priority has been to advocate for a deficit reduction package that would be deemed credible by the financial markets and would put us on a path to fiscal stability. I think, given the situation that exists around the world today, nothing could have been more impactful in a positive way producing such a package.

Financial experts agree—and they have now for years—that we are on the wrong path, that we are spending far too much in relationship to our anemic growth and GDP, and that we have staggered along for 3 years but continued to spend an extraordinary amount of money without seeing the economy recover.

A number of plans have come forward. One year ago today, Simpson-Bowles produced one of those types of bold plans that could help get us back on this fiscal path to prosperity. As you know, Mr. Bowles was the Chief of Staff to our former President Bill Clinton. He and our former colleague Alan Simpson put together a package that—whether you agreed with all of it or not, certainly was something that could have put us on a more fiscally sound path. Yet those recommendations were rejected out of hand by the White House and others.

We have seen the activities and presentations of the Gang of 6. Forty-plus Senators, including me, came together in a bipartisan way to urge the President to join us in pushing for a bold, comprehensive plan. That was rejected. Earlier in the year, the President's budget was laughed out of this Chamber. Not one person—either Democrat or Republican—voted for it.

Then in August we came far short of what we needed to do to address our debt crisis when Congress passed the Budget Control Act. I was not able to support that particular plan. Although it averted a default on our debt, it fell woefully short of what was needed to address our fiscal situation. Nevertheless, that opportunity—which we had with the involvement of both parties to do something truly significant—was passed over.

So then it fell to the committee of 12, which is called the supercommittee. Many of us—offered suggestions and urged those members to try and go beyond the minimum of \$1.2 trillion of deficit reduction over a 10-year period of time.

There was a so-called Draconian sequester, or across-the-board cut, that would go into place automatically, starting in 2013, if the committee could not come to an agreement. The consensus at the time was these cuts would be so Draconian that it would force an agreement among Republicans and Democrats—to come forward with at least a minimal plan. Many of us were urging them to do much more, to bring forth something that would be credible with the investment community and restore confidence that America understood the dire situation we were in and we were doing something about it as representatives of the people.

No clearer message came to this body than the message sent in November of 2010 with the historic turnover of Members and an outpouring of support for putting the future of our country, our fiscal future and economic future and the future of our children and grandchildren ahead of politics. Yet it is politics that defeated the effort.

Now, it is easy to blame the committee of 12. I know there was an earnest attempt to come together. I believe, politically, perhaps, it was doomed from the start just by the way it was designed. That is one of the reasons I voted against that proposal. Nevertheless, they made an earnest attempt but, unfortunately, were not able to bring it home.

So the responsibility falls not just on those 12, but it falls on this entire Congress because we would not even have gotten to that supercommittee if we had done our job earlier and presented a real plan in August, when we were bumping up against the debt limit extension. That's when we should have done what most of us intuitively understand needs to be done. Yet the political considerations and ramifications were such that we came forward with a very timid and woefully short plan of what we needed to do.

The President has to take some responsibility. We cannot really bring forward a bold change in the way the U.S. Government does business unless we have bipartisan support. We cannot get that bipartisan support unless the Chief Executive, the quarterback of the team, stands up and says: I want to be involved and engaged and stay engaged. While there was some rhetoric coming out of the White House, there was no plan. As I said, the only plan we have had from the President—his budget plan—was rejected earlier this year on a unanimous vote, every Republican and every Democrat turned it down.

The President has said some nice words about what we needed to do and so forth and so on. But he was AWOL. As I said, the quarterback of the team needs to be engaged. He is the key person. Yet that quarterback was not even on the field. So responsibility falls on both Congress and the White House. I think some responsibility also falls on outside groups who distorted what we were trying to do, who mischarac-

terized what Republicans were seeking to accomplish, and there was some mischaracterization of what Democrats were seeking to accomplish as well. But it was an undermining process. Those groups that supposedly are representative of seniors across this country, the shameful way in which they distorted the message and what we were trying to do—and, obviously, it had a political impact here and put restraint on Members because their base was being lied to in terms of what was under consideration and what we were trying to do.

We all know Social Security and Medicare are not going to have the funds available in the future to provide the services that were promised to the American people. Yet any attempt to try to salvage and save and retain those programs' solvency was distorted by these groups that supposedly represent the interests of our seniors. Many of these groups falsely claimed that we were trying to take away their program, we were trying to destroy their program.

I mean, how ridiculous it is that someone is going to come in here and say: My goal is to destroy retirement benefits for the American people or I am here to take away health benefits for American retirees. None of us are here to do that.

These programs are law. They are in place. We want them to be more efficient, more effective, but, more importantly, we want them to remain solvent. Yet outside groups were basically sending just the opposite messages. So the Congress failed. We came up short. But having done so, Congress cannot avoid the responsibility we have to do everything in our power to try to address a very serious fiscal problem that exists in this country.

Years and years, decades and decades, not only this Congress but former Congresses, not only this President but former Presidents have made promises to the American people that we now are unable to keep because we do not have the fiscal capability of doing so. We have not had a budget come out of the Congress in more than 1,000 days. There is some indication that we will have a budget next year. I sincerely hope we can get together and come forward with a deficit reduction budget, one that recognizes the fiscal plight in which we find ourselves. I will work with both sides of the aisle to try to accomplish that. We have to acknowledge that we continue to spend trillions more dollars than we have available to us. No nation can sustain that.

All we have to do is look across the Atlantic at what is taking place in Europe from country to country. It is not just Greece, it is not just Portugal, it is not just Ireland anymore. It is Italy and maybe France and maybe other countries. The European Union is struggling to try to address this serious debt crisis, the same type of problem we have here.

There have been many here that look at Europe and say: They need to get